

Reflections of a Legislative Intern

By Nathan Hetzler

The 2014 legislative session has officially concluded for the year. It was an exciting year for Maryland policy and clean energy! This session we worked on a slew of energy bills relating to the state's electric vehicle tax crediting system and bills that address the needs of Maryland's beloved farmers, along with legislation related to the energy efficient home construction loan program. As a legislative intern, I've been extraordinarily fortunate to work with the extremely passionate and talented folks at MEA.

I joined MEA at the beginning of session. My first morning was also the morning that Governor Martin O'Malley presented his final budget proposal at a press conference in the State House. Less than one hour after I arrived, I headed off to the State House to take notes and get a preview of my legislative internship. I remember that morning fondly. There was a lot of energy in the room because the Governor was slated to present the last budget of his second term in office. Looking back on my time with MEA, I believe that this event set an animated tone for what would occur over the rest of my internship.

I witnessed a lot of the behind the scenes work of staff preparing for session. I spent a great many hours in committee chambers listening to Senators and Delegates debate the merits and demerits of every bill before them. I also witnessed droves of Marylanders who came to Annapolis to testify at committee on various bills of importance to them. Democracy in action is truly fascinating.

The 2014 legislative season was grueling and MEA didn't come away with every victory. The session made a lasting impression on me. I gained hands on civic knowledge and honed valuable skills in a relatively short period of time. I learned how new legislation is introduced in the General Assembly but also how easily it can fail if it doesn't have sufficient support. Beyond legislative lessons, I now know more about

energy infrastructure, and policy. Perhaps more than I ever imagined. I learned that Energy policy can be quite technical and in order to speak intelligently about it, one must have a broad base of knowledge. Before my internship with MEA I didn't really have that knowledge. I had to learn a new language and new ways of thinking in rather short order. I also had to learn how to take fast and accurate notes in committee meetings while keeping my attention on the pertinent discussion. While it may sound easy, it's a tricky skill to master.

Before my internship with MEA, my experience working with practical legislation was pretty limited. There's a huge difference between learning about how laws are made and watching it happen first hand. I would highly recommend that any political science or public policy student find a way to intern during legislative session. I have found at least two benefits that I can attest to. The first is real world experience. I've already mentioned this, but learning how to apply what you've learned in the classroom to real and real time problems is an important step for anyone thinking about pursuing politics as a career. The second is the opportunity to meet energetic and committed people who are interested in doing work that effects change. They can impart really good advice and help you make your first steps towards a career. MEA is an especially great place to intern for this reason. Everyone I have encountered here has been supportive and helpful as I make my transition from college to "the real world." They've inspired me to refocus and further pursue a career in energy policy and environmental politics. I'm deeply grateful to all of them for the great opportunity they've given me.